My name is **Natalie Cabinda**, and I’m a detourist. I was born, raised, and educated in the West African country of Cameroon. My life has been a series of detours, but none has been strong enough to prevent me from finding my way back to the road less traveled. My first detour occurred at about the age of 6 when I was in the 2nd grade. I was the sixth of ten children and born at a time when education for girls wasn’t a priority. In fact, my older sisters never went to school, and my oldest sibling in particular did not want the same fate for me. She had gotten married at the age of 15 and had moved to a more civilized part of my country where English was taught, and secondary schools were abundant. My poor, uneducated parents never really understood the need for education until my older brother who had chosen military training, pressured them into sending me away to live with my sister. My brother had noticed the haphazard way my parents were treating my school attendance and decided to take matters into his own hands. And so at about six years old, I left the comfort and nurturing village environment of my parents to live with my older sister in another part of the country, hundreds of miles away from my parents and my village. My brother had also sensed that my parents might not be able to afford the school fees for admission into the only secondary school in my village at the time, hence the need for my trip from the north west to the south west province of Cameroon. I would miss the pampering and nurturing from my parents, and be bounced from one household to another like a foster child, culminating in a series of mini detours, and some of the greatest challenges of my childhood years. Many of these detours which include periods of hunger and starvation, periods of homelessness and abandonment, severe endangerment during a Coup d'etat, incidents of attempted rape, and incidents of intense flooding that left me and many others stranded, have been detailed in my upcoming memoir. Despite the difficulties of growing up in such a poverty-stricken environment, and missing my parents terribly, education was always the light at the end of the tunnel. It is the pursuit of education that will lead to my next major detour.

The detour..…In August 2005, my life changed forever.

In 1994 I immigrated to the United States, leaving behind my entire extended family, plus a familiar environment. Life without the extended family or a support entourage became extremely challenging for me and my newly migrated family of two babies and a husband. After 17 years of trying to make my marriage work, my ex-husband and I finally separated in 2005. The process of going through an American judicial system, working with lawyers and filing motions was one of the most daunting and challenging periods in my life. By the time the process came to an end, I had shrunk from a size 12 to a size 6. I was thankful when the divorce was finally granted after being in court for about a year. However, when my ex husband moved to another state shortly after the divorce, I found myself raising all three children alone, unemployed and with no support entourage.

Relying on my skills as a teacher and a parent, frequently consulting with counselors, colleagues, and other single parents, I was able to regroup, refocus and rebuild, setting myself and my children on a path beyond divorce. First I went back to school and obtained a teaching certificate, then I interviewed and was immediately hired to teach high school English/ESL, and then I wrote my bestseller, **Regroup.Refocus.Rebuild**: ***Helping Families Navigate from Breakups to Breakthroughs***. My older kids have graduated college with first degrees and are pursuing their careers. My youngest is scheduled to graduate college next spring. I am a speaker with a voice and a message intended to motivate, empower, and inspire other single mothers or families to regroup, refocus and rebuild. And this is why I #LoveMyDetour.

Natalie Cabinda /Educator/Author/Speaker

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